

Winter Use Plan and EIS

Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks

John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Memorial Parkway



Newsletter – December 2005

The National Park Service (NPS) has begun preparation of a long-term plan for managing winter recreational use in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Memorial Parkway. The initial public scoping phase of this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process closed on September 1, 2005. The next public comment opportunity will be when the Draft EIS is released in late- Spring 2006.

WHY ANOTHER EIS?

The Temporary Winter Use EA is only intended to guide winter management for three winter seasons; this winter will be the second season of operation under the temporary EA. During this three-year period, the EA states that the NPS will prepare a long-term analysis on winter use in the parks.

DEVELOPMENT OF MODELING SCENARIOS

The NPS has developed the following ten scenarios for modeling purposes. These scenarios will be utilized for sound and air quality modeling for the EIS. The NPS has met with most cooperating agencies to discuss each of these scenarios, and has received valuable feedback during these discussions. While these modeling scenarios represent a wide range of possible conditions, it is expected that only certain elements of them will be carried forward during the development of alternatives.

Unless otherwise noted, each scenario will incorporate BAT requirements for both snowmobiles and snowcoaches, with one exception. On the Grassy Lake Road,

snowmobiles originating in the Targhee National Forest may travel to Flagg Ranch and back and are not subject to a BAT requirement.

SCENARIO A

Allows for nearly historic levels of snowmobile use and requires commercial guiding. This scenario mirrors the temporary winter use plan currently in place and will model 720 snowmobiles and 78 snowcoaches per day in Yellowstone National Park. Firehole Canyon Drive open in afternoon to snowmobiles and Lake Butte open to snowmobiles. All other side roads will be modeled as open to snowcoaches only. For Grand Teton National Park & the John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Memorial Parkway (the Parkway), this scenario will model 50 snowmobiles per day on both the Grassy Lake Road and Continental Divide Snowmobile Trail (CDST), as well as 40 snowmobiles per day on Jackson Lake for fishing access.

SCENARIO B

Emphasizes commercial snowcoach access; prohibits recreational snowmobiling in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the Parkway. Road grooming would continue. This scenario most closely matches a November 2000 court decision and will model 105 BAT snowcoaches per day.

SCENARIO C

Prohibits road grooming or packing on most road segments in Yellowstone National Park. In Yellowstone, the road from the South Entrance to Old Faithful

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You may also contact Yellowstone National Park at: 307-244-2019.

would be the only oversnow motorized access route maintained; 250 commercially guided snowmobiles and 20 snowcoaches will be modeled. All side roads will be modeled as closed. For Grand Teton National Park & the Parkway, this scenario will model 50 snowmobiles per day on the Grassy Lake Road. Jackson Lake and the CDST will be modeled as closed to snowmobiling in this scenario.

SCENARIO D

Emphasizes research on bison movements and ecology. The road segment between Norris and Madison would not be groomed to allow for an experiment to study the effects of road packing on bison. Allows for continued snowmobile and snowcoach use at nearly historic levels, although travel would not be permitted between Norris and Madison. This scenario will model 680 snowmobiles and 76 snowcoaches per day in Yellowstone National Park. Sylvan Pass would be closed to oversnow travel. For Grand Teton National Park & the Parkway, this scenario will model 50 snowmobiles per day on the Grassy Lake Road and 40 snowmobiles per day on Jackson Lake for fishing access. The CDST will be modeled as closed in this scenario.

SCENARIO E

Allows for increased snowmobile use relative to historic numbers. Commercial guides would be required for most snowmobilers; some could also visit the park after completing a non-commercial guide training course. This scenario will model 1,025 snowmobiles and 105 snowcoaches per day in Yellowstone National Park. For Grand Teton National Park & the Parkway, this scenario will model 75 snowmobiles per day on both the Grassy Lake Road and Continental Divide Snowmobile Trail (CDST), as well as 100 snowmobiles per day on Jackson Lake for fishing access.

SCENARIO F

Allows limited snowmobile and snowcoach use roughly comparable to the winters of 2003-2004 and 2004-2005. This scenario will model 315 snowmobiles and 40 snowcoaches per day in Yellowstone National Park. Firehole Canyon Drive will be modeled as open in afternoons to snowmobiles. Lake Butte will be modeled as open to snowmobiles. All other side roads open to snowcoaches only. For Grand Teton National Park & the Parkway, this scenario will model 20 snowmobiles per day on the Grassy Lake Road as well as 10 snowmobiles per day on Jackson Lake for fishing access. The CDST will be modeled as closed in this scenario.

SCENARIO G

Balances snowmobile and snowcoach access and accommodates visitors who wish to have an unguided snowmobile experience. This scenario will model 540 snowmobiles and 83 snowcoaches per day in Yellowstone National Park. Firehole Canyon Drive will be modeled as open in afternoons to snowmobiles. Lake Butte will be modeled as open to snowmobiles with all other side roads modeled as open to snowcoaches only. For Grand Teton National Park & the Parkway, this scenario will model 75 snowmobiles per day on both the Grassy Lake Road and Continental Divide Snowmobile Trail (CDST), as well as 40 snowmobiles per day on Jackson Lake for fishing access.

SCENARIO H

Provides maximum flexibility for businesses to respond to visitors' demand on busy days, with limits on the number of visitors that may enter the park each winter season. Businesses can decide how they want to "spend" their seasonal allocation. This scenario will model 50,000 commercially guided snowmobiles per season, with a daily maximum of 800, and 90 snowcoaches per day in Yellowstone National Park. Firehole

Canyon Drive will be modeled as open in afternoons to snowmobiles. Lake Butte will be modeled as open to snowmobiles and all other side roads will be modeled as open to snowcoaches only. For Grand Teton National Park & the Parkway, this scenario will model 75 snowmobiles per day on the Grassy Lake Road, as well as 40 snowmobiles per day on Jackson Lake for fishing access. The CDST will be modeled as closed in this scenario.

SCENARIO I

Emphasizes plowing Yellowstone's west-side roads to promote winter visitation opportunities by an unlimited number of commercially guided wheeled vehicles. Allows commercially guided snowmobile access through the South Entrance and on the east side of the park. Sylvan Pass would be closed to oversnow travel. This scenario will model 250 snowmobiles per day through the South Entrance and 100 snowmobiles per day originating at Old Faithful. It will also model 40 snowcoaches per day in Yellowstone National Park. Side roads will be modeled as groomed or plowed, based on location. For Grand Teton National Park & the Parkway, this scenario will model 50 snowmobiles per day on the Grassy Lake Road and 40

snowmobiles per day on Jackson Lake for fishing access. The CDST will be modeled as closed in this scenario.

SCENARIO J

Returns winter use management to the essentially unregulated conditions of the past. These conditions were found to impair park resources and values. This scenario will model historic use levels of 795 snowmobiles and 20 snowcoaches per day in Yellowstone National Park. All side roads will be modeled as open to snowmobiles. For Grand Teton National Park & the Parkway, this scenario will model 25 snowmobiles per day on both the Grassy Lake Road and Continental Divide Snowmobile Trail (CDST), as well as 40 snowmobiles per day on Jackson Lake for fishing access. No BAT or guiding requirements will be modeled for this scenario.

NEXT STEPS

The air and soundscape modeling results, along with wildlife, operational, and economic considerations, will be used to select the alternatives that will be analyzed in the Draft EIS.

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